



Tracing Ancestry in Scotland's Heritable Land Records

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Overview Scotland Land Records

Information about Scotland land records can be found in the FamilySearch Wiki or at the National Archives of Scotland website:

FamilySearch Wiki: https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Scotland_Land_and_Property

National Archives of Scotland: <http://www.nas.gov.uk>

Important Tips to Know:

- Land in Scotland could not be bequeathed in a will before 1868.
- By law the eldest son inherited (primogeniture).
- If there was no son, property was equally divided among all the daughters.
- The heir of the deceased had to prove his entitlement.
- Understand different Scottish jurisdictions.
- Only a small percent of people owned land, however we should always search for ancestral relatives in the land records because they name family relationships.
- Search the indexes for all ancestral surnames.
- Understand some background about why these records were created.
- You may encounter reading old handwriting, some Latin, and old Scottish terms.

Services of Heirs and Retours

Process of Services of Heirs & Retours


These are some of the most important Scottish land records for establishing relationships and identifying properties. Many of these records begin in the 1500s and include: Indexes, Abstracts, and Original records. Heritable (real) or immovable property included land, buildings and mineral rights. When a landowner died:

1. Chancery courts sent a letter (Brief of Successions) to the Sheriff courts asking for an investigation to determine the legal heir of the deceased.
2. A jury of local landowners was selected who determined the legal heir.
3. The Sheriff courts then sent a retour (decision and findings of the jury) back to the Chancery courts.
4. The Chancery court tried to track down the legal heir (even in America). These are the Services of Heirs.

How to Access Services of Heirs Records

The Family History Library (FHL) collection includes indexes, abstracts, and original records for Services of Heirs. The indexes are valuable as you may find family relationships!

Decennial Indexes: 1700-1859 (Digitized!)

- Go to <https://www.familysearch.org>
- Go to the *Search* tab and click *Catalog*.
- Click *Film/Fiche Number* and enter the film number 990340, then click *Search*.
- Click the link then scroll down until you see the camera icon, then click it. 
- At the Family History Library access the books on the B2 Floor with the following call number: Q book 941 R2ch vols. 1-4.

Decennial Indexes: 1860-1959 (Not digitized)

Index to the records of services kept in chancery. A continuation of the Decennial indexes.

- Located in the Family History Library on the B2 Floor with the call numbers: 941 R2cha.

Heir of Tailie/Tailzie Indexes: 1685-1914 (Not digitized)

- Called a Deed of Tailzie or Entail
- Allowed a landowner to decide who would inherit the estate for generations to come
- Heir usually had to take the surname of the entailer along with the lands.
- Legal to entail estates between 1685-1914.
- After 1848, estates could be disentailed. These records continue beyond 1914.
- 1685-1784 = Located at the FHL; FHL Film 990216 Item 4 or book 941 R2sh.
- After 1833 records are held at the National Archives of Scotland

Scottish-American Heirs, 1683-1883 (Digitized! \$)

An alphabetical list of American heirs of deceased Scottish landowners extracted from the Services of Heirs.

1. Go to <https://www.ancestry.com>
2. Go to the *Search* tab and click *Card Catalog*.
3. In the *Title* search type *Scottish-American Heirs*.
4. Click the link and begin searching

Services of Heirs- Refused petitions: 1849-1851

Services of Heirs: refused petitions

- FHL microfilm 231903 (Digitized!)

Abstracts 1530-1700: (Digitized!)

A snippet of original records. May include relationships. These records are in Latin.

1. Go to <https://www.familysearch.org>
2. Go to the *Search* tab and click *Catalog*
3. Click *Film/Fiche Number* and enter the film number 90884, then hit Enter.
4. Click the link. Then click the link in red to first search the index. After searching the index, click either Vol. 1 or Vol 2. Also available on book form FHL 941 A2i v. 1-3.

Abstracts 1855-1955: Abstracts of Services of Heirs... (Not digitized)

At the Family History Library, access the books or films on the B2 Floor with the following call or film numbers:

- FHL book 941 P2scs v. 31-130 and FHL microfilms 1,441,082 – 1,441,099


Abstracts 1544-1699:

Retours of services of heirs: (The decision and findings of the jury sent from the Sherriff courts). At the Family History Library go to the Patron Desktop and click on CDs. Enter in the following CD number: *CD-ROM no. 252*

Original records: (Digitized!)

These are the original Services of Heir records which the indexes and abstracts lead too! Each volume is self-indexed at the end of the volume.

Original records: 1530-1900: Services of Heirs [in Latin until 1847]

1. Go to <https://www.familysearch.org/>
2. Go to the *Search* tab and click *Catalog*
3. Click *Film/Fiche Number* and enter the film number 231260
4. Click the link *Services of heirs, 1530-1900*.
5. Scroll down to the desired years. Click the camera icon to view the images online. 

To learn more about Services of Heirs and see what records are located in The National Archives of Scotland go to the following link:

<https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/guides/inheriting-land-and-buildings>

Sasines

Process of Sasines: (pronounced: "Sayzuns")

The term 'sasine' comes from the action 'to seize.' A 'sasine' documented the act of:

- Taking possession of a piece of land, building or minerals in the ground.
- It was the transfer of land to a new proprietor.
- Symbolic for the grantor to pick up a rock or earth and hand it over to the grantee.
- Witnesses needed to be present when the grantee took possession of the land.
- Sasines were needed for any transfer of land and immovable property, including heritable land and Crown grants of land.
- These acts were recorded in the Register of Sasines and are a primary source for information on ownership of land and property.
- The register began in 1617 and continues today, but earlier Sasines do survive from the mid-1500s.

Divisions of the Register of Sasines:


- General register (containing sasines for anywhere in the country)
- Particular registers (kept for each county)
- Burgh registers (kept for cities)

How to Access Sasines Records

The Register of Sasines is indexed from 1781 and easy to use. Prior to that year, there are partial indexes. For a list of records available at the National Archives of Scotland in Edinburgh (NAS) go to the following link <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/guides/sasines>.


General Register of Sasines: Indexes 1617-1700 (Digitized!)

Mention names, places, and relationships.

1. Go to <https://www.familysearch.org>, then go to the *Search* tab and click *Catalog*.
2. Click *Film/Fiche Number* and enter the film number 216970.
3. Click the link then find the desired year and click the camera icon . For indexes 1701-1720: FHL film 874420 or Q book 941 B4sp no. 3.

Particular Registers of Sasines: Abridgements (Digitized!)


Go to <https://www.familysearch.org>, then go to the *Search* tab and click *Catalog*.

1. Click *Film/Fiche Number* and enter the film number(s):
 - a. 217026 for Indexes of Persons to Abridgements; By county (1781-1868)
 - b. 217075 for Indexes of Places to Abridgements; By county (1781-1830)
 - c. 217088 for Abridgements of Sasines (1781-1868)
2. Click the link then find the desired year and click the camera icon . (For additional Registers check the *Catalog* under *Places* for the specific County).

Burgh Registers of Sasines: (Registers kept by the cities. Includes minute books)

1. Go to <https://www.familysearch.org>
2. Go to the *Search* tab and click *Catalog*
3. Click *Keyword* and type "Scotland Burgh Registers"
4. Find the desired city to get the FHL film or book numbers.

Minute Books: (Minutes regarding the Sasines)

1. Go to <https://www.familysearch.org>
2. Go to the *Search* tab and click *Catalog*
3. Click *Film/Fiche Number* and enter the following film number(s).
 - a. 216977 for General Register, Minute books (1717- 1782)
 - b. 216980 for Particular Register Minute books (1599-1793)- Being digitized!
4. Click the link then find the year and get the microfilm unless a camera icon is available. 

Secretary Registers (only 7 of 17 districts survive)

1. Indexes (1599-1690)- FHL Q books 941 B4sp (multiple volumes)

For other records search the library's online catalog at <https://www.familysearch.org> (do a Place search) for a burgh or county of interest, or for 'Scotland,' and the topic of 'Land and property.'